

E. HOWARD

An exclusive interview
the CIA superspy who
engineered both the
Bay of Pigs and Watergate

CIA 1.04 Hunt, Howard
SO 4.01.2 UNDERCOVER
CIA 4.01 ASSASSINATION
CIA 2.04.2 STUDENTS
✓ FOUNDATIONS
(orig under Penthouse)

Howard Hunt is certainly the most famous, if not the most successful, agent in the twenty-five-year history of the CIA. He is also a prolific author, having published more than forty novels under various pseudonyms since his first book, *East of Farewell*, in 1942. He was twenty-four years old at the time, and he had just been discharged from the Navy. Reenlisting in the Army Air Corps the next year, he joined the Office of Strategic Services—the OSS, the forerunner of the CIA—and thereby embarked on a career as a spy that was to take him to far-flung places over the next quarter-century, a career that culminated in his arrest for masterminding the Watergate break-in in 1972.

The CIA's image as the exotic but essential protector of American democracy has lately been eroded by revelations of massive illegal spying on American citizens, and also by charges that it is a law unto itself, cloaked and daggered with secrecy, intrigue and murder—charges that include the often repeated rumor that the agency even had a hand in the assassination of John F. Kennedy. But in the Cold War deep-freeze, in the years immediately following World War II, the CIA was a useful refuge for superpatriots like E. Howard Hunt, to whom the Red Menace and the Yellow Peril seemed both frightful and imminent. In that atmosphere, virtually anyone to the left of Joe McCarthy was suspect as a pinko dupe.

In the early 1950's, Hunt began his CIA career as an operative in Mexico, where he befriended a young recruit who was later to become both his ideological mentor and the godfather of several of his children—William F. Buckley, Jr. In 1954, Hunt had his first taste of the CIA nitty-gritty when he helped overthrow the freely elected government of President Jacobo Arbenz of Guatemala. At about the same time Fidel Castro, a young Cuban lawyer, was organizing his band of guerrillas in the Sierra Maestra mountains, and within a few years he had deposed the Batista regime.

Hunt was moved from his post in the American embassy in Montevideo, Uruguay—where he had been photographed proudly pumping Eisenhower's hand on the president's official visit—to Miami, to begin organizing the colony of anti-Castro expatriates, the *gusanos*, for an attempt to overthrow Castro. For two years, Hunt worked feverishly in Florida and at the CIA operations base in Guatemala to prepare for the landing in the Bay of Pigs in 1961.

"It was the hardest thing I ever had to do," he told *Penthouse* interviewer Ken Kelley. "The great strengths and the great weaknesses of the Latin people were on hourly display."

Hunt was embittered by President Kennedy's refusal to commit air support to the Bay of Pigs mercenaries, and when the popular uprising of the Cuban people, which he had predicted, failed to materialize, Hunt's dream of becoming the Bolívar of Cuba was shattered. All was not in vain, however, for Hunt became very close friends with many Cubans; and a decade later, when he and G. Gordon Liddy were charged with the task of recruiting a spy/burglar team for break-ins at Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist's office and Democratic Party headquarters in the Watergate, Hunt chose four

of his Cuban friends to work with him.

The Watergate operation, of course, was as big a disaster as the Bay of Pigs. Some of the story is now well known: As the payment for his early silence in jail, Hunt was promised "hush money" by Richard Nixon through the White House frontmen, and Hunt's wife Dorothy, who acted as his agent, was killed in a plane crash near Chicago in December 1972. Her body was found with \$10,000 in her purse. Some "experts" on Watergate have claimed that sabotage was involved. But Hunt doesn't think so, though he is suing the airline for negligence.

Hunt also has a spate of other lawsuits on his hands, including a recent one he brought against the *National Tattler* for printing pictures purporting to show him in Dallas on November 22, 1963. He denies being in Dallas at the time and professes outrage that anyone should think he was involved in the assassination of John Kennedy. He also denies having anything to do with the attempted assassination of Alabama Governor George Wallace, although he doubts that Arthur Bremer acted alone.

An interesting historical footnote was revealed to *Penthouse* in this interview. Hunt had originally demanded \$132,000 as payment for his silence; and Fred LaRue, the White House emissary, was authorized by President Nixon through John Dean to pay the entire sum in cash. For some reason, according to Hunt, LaRue only delivered \$75,000. When he then had to come back to Dean for a further authorization—as Hunt would not accept the smaller sum—Dean presumed that Hunt was trying to blackmail the White House for more money, unaware that LaRue had simply been short-changing the original authorization. Dean then went to the prosecutors with his information. And therein, as Hunt told interviewer Kelley, "lay the seeds of the falling apart."

Hunt freely admits his knowledge and involvement in CIA domestic operations—illegal under the CIA's charter from Congress. He maintains that he objected to the CIA's funding of the National Student Association, and that there was "a serious fraud against the American people because contributions were being solicited by the Advertising Council on behalf of Radio Free Europe, which was simply a funding cover."

His latest book, *Undercover* (Putnam), contains by his own admission an outright lie in at least one crucial passage, a fact that emerged in last year's Watergate cover-up trial. Later editions of the book have deleted the passage.

As this interview reveals, E. Howard Hunt is a beaten man, bereft of most of his old friends, a widower who sees himself as despised by many of his fellow citizens. He blames the media—in much the same way the convicted felon and former vice president, Spiro Agnew, does—for many of his troubles.

He plans to forsake America permanently for Italy once his legal problems permit him to do so. "I'll leave others to face the problem of getting America going again," he says. "The people I put my trust in did not come through."

Continued